

RAILROADING in NEW JERSEY



RAILROAD FANS

Cameras ready, rail travel enthusiasts are shown after piling out of their special train during a stop at a transfer point.

(Picture Credits: Thomas T. Taber, Walter A. Lucas and Howard E. Johnston)

(New Jersey probably had a more important role in the establishment and development of railroads than any other state in the country. This article, the seventeenth and last chapter of a series, deals with hobbyists of all ages devoted to the steel trail and the "iron horse.")

EVERY time the pioneer railroad builders laid a stretch of rail past a New Jersey farm or built a roundhouse in a village they created rail fans. Down through the years the whistle of a locomotive has called to all people, has drawn them along as surely as a magnet attracts iron filings.

There is no mystery in this unquestionably widespread affection for railroading. It's easy for any one, at any age, to become enthusiastic about thundering locomotives, headed for far-off places. This, combined with the traditional friendliness of train crews and the dramatic appeal of their work, makes rail fandom completely natural.

Small boys, of course, become rail fans as naturally as they climb trees. The intriguing thing is that the boys grow into men and in the growing find their railroad zest broadened and deepened.

THE rail fan progresses through various stages, graduating from waving at an engineer to taking his picture or cataloguing his engine. He collects pictures, timetables and lanterns. Soon he decides to specialize in a single railroad or a single type of railroad. Ultimately he starts to explore the history of the railroad he has chosen as his "own."

Then he's well on his way to becoming a "permanent" rail fan; a rail fan senior grade.

Jersey's best known "permanent" railroad hobbyists

are probably Thomas T. Taber of Madison and Walter A. Lucas of Hawthorne. Any discussion of rail fandom and the accomplishment of its devotees must start with them and go outward. Actually, Taber and Lucas typify the evolution of rail fans everywhere.

Not too surprisingly, Lucas and Taber have been friends since boyhood.

Walter was brought up in Paterson, an area known throughout the world for its locomotive builders. Railroading was Paterson's most honored profession as the 20th Century dawned and Walter's playgrounds were the shops and roundhouses. Taber grew up in residential Montclair and spent as much time as he could at the Lacka-

Walter and Tom can each identify a single incident prior to World War I which fixed for all time their hobby objectives.

Lucas at the time was struck by an advertisement in a Paterson paper of a forthcoming annual meeting of the Paterson & Hudson River Railroad. His inquiries brought him the unsatisfying

information that the P. & H. R. was "just a trolley line to Edgewater." He decided to investigate further.

At about the same time Taber was chatting with Engineer Bob Taylor. "I wish you would think of some way for me to do something for you," said Tom, boyishly.

Bob thought for a moment. "Tom," he replied, "You can't do anything for me person-

tributions to the field of railroad history.

Lucas started intensive digging into old newspaper and records in 1930 to compile the history of the Paterson & Hudson River, which he had long since learned was the railroad chartered in 1831 to link Paterson and Jersey City. It became an important part of the Erie's main line across

Jersey in 1853.

Taber built a home in Madison and moved his family there in 1931. He was back on the line of his old love—the Morris & Essex (Lackawanna) and in renewing old railroad acquaintances recalled Engineer Bob Taylor's request.

"Why not?" mused Taber—and he too set about hunting up retired railroad men

New York in 1836. Lucas reasoned that he was on the right track because the gauge was similar to that on the Paterson & Hudson River.

He wrote Robert Stephenson & Co. in England (still actively in business), giving dates and data which he had been unable to supply in previous correspondence. He was rewarded with a detailed

description of the locomotive.

Taber had picture troubles, too. Because he settled in Madison his most earnest desire was a picture of locomotive No. 24, the "Madison." He tried in vain for years to find the missing picture. One day, without warning, a letter arrived from the son of the Madison's engineer saying that he had heard of Tom's search. He had the picture at his home in Texas. Would Taber like to copy it?

SENIOR railfans constantly perform volunteer and unremunerative jobs for the railroads which they cherish. Taber's experiences are typical.

At the Lackawanna's request he has furnished material for railroad exhibitions in connection with many community historical celebrations. He was instrumental in sponsoring a "Railroad Appreciation Day" in Madison in 1937, a day in which more than 8,000 people went through railroad equipment.

"Appreciation Day" was climaxed by the placing of a bronze tablet in the railroad station to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first train. That tablet, incidentally, is probably the only one of its kind in the nation.

Three years later, in 1940, Tom arranged Madison's contribution to the Morris County

Many Varieties of Railroad Fans Thrill to Engine's Roar and Click of Wheels on Rails

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

wanna roundhouse where engines laid over. His many afternoons there in association with Engineers Bob Taylor, Bob Roden, Morris LaTouche and Clarence Baker propelled him along fandom road.

BOTH of the boys had cameras as soon as they were old enough to operate them. Soon after they met, about 1910, they set out to look for new worlds to snap, usually astride the temperamental "one lung" motorcycle owned by Lucas. Often, too, they used special Sunday excursions sponsored by the Jersey Central or Lehigh Valley as an inexpensive way of expanding their knowledge and picture collections of "foreign" railroads.

ally, but you can do something for all of us. You love and understand this railroad. Why don't you write a story about the Morris & Essex?"

Lucas went to work on an Erie track gang as a youth, worked his way up through the engineering departments of several railroads and a car building firm. Taber enlisted in the Marines in World War I and after his return from service worked and lived far from the tracks of his beloved Morris & Essex.

THE P. & H. R. and the M. & E. railroads were temporarily shelved as the natural result of two men growing into new responsibilities. Then, at about the same time, the two revived serious work on major con-

and digging in attics, museums and old book and antique shops.

Both research tasks were climaxed with books. Lucas published his "From the Hills to the Hudson" in 1944 and Taber finished "Commuter Railroad" in 1947.

THE patience and perseverance required to track down a single railroad historical item can be shown in Lucas's search for an authentic drawing of the first locomotive on the P. & H. R. He knew that it had been built in England, but little else.

Months of careful digging in early New York newspapers finally netted him the information that a locomotive he believed to be the one he sought had been delivered in



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NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS

JERSEY RAILROADS

(Cont'd from Preceding Page)

Bi-Centennial celebration. His contribution was a borrowed automotive model of an historic train which symbolized the theme of early days on the Morris & Essex.

A CONTRIBUTION much different—and certainly unique—was Taber's spearheading of opposition to a bus line which sought a franchise which Taber felt would supply unequal competition to the railroad. Without prompting from the railroad, Taber fought the franchise in local meetings at all official hearings. He was mainly responsible for the denial of the franchise.

Lucas and Taber were lead-



"Appreciation Day" tablet in Madison.

ers in organizing one of New Jersey's first rail fan trips, aboard a chartered train which traveled over the Lackawanna on July 19, 1936, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Morris & Essex.

Two years later the same group of fans approached President Davis of the Lackawanna with the idea of preserving and refurbishing of old Engine 952, the last of the famous commuter "Camelbacks" on the line. They found agreement from Davis that the locomotive should be exhibited at the New York World's Fair. The group did the lighter work on the engine, then turned the engine over to the railroad to finish.

AS a sequel to the rebuilding of old 952 a new fan group

was organized—the Railroadians of America, started in 1939 as an association of "those whose avocation is the study of railroading." One of the principal aims of the group was the establishment of a museum in the New York area for the preservation and exhibition of railroad memorabilia. That aim came to fruition last October when a Railroadian-sponsored permanent exhibit opened at the New Jersey Historical Society, 230 Broadway, Newark.

The exhibit includes a varied collection of photographs, maps, tickets, time tables and lithographs and such major items as locomotive headlights, signals, semaphores, engine bells and crossing gongs. Much of the material now on exhibition has been donated to the society from the personal collection of Lucas and Taber.

One of the prime items in the exhibit is a one-quarter size model of an old coal "jimmy," an exact copy of "jimmies" used to haul coal on the Jersey Central 80 years ago. It was the gift of Warren B. Crater of Roselle Park, who kept it in his cellar for 13 years waiting for a railroad museum to open in New Jersey.

Crater is a different type fan from either Lucas or Taber—different because he is a full-fledged railroad engineer, something rare in rail fandom. Lucas, by way of



Amateur "black gang" of Madison businessmen grooming a "camelback" at Lackawanna's Kingsland shops for New York World's Fair exhibit.

contrast, is an associate editor of the "Locomotive Cyclopaedia" and the Car Builder's Cyclopaedia" for the Simmons-Boardman Publishing Co. in New York. Taber, by way of greater contrast, is with a life insurance company (and also finds time to serve as a Madison Borough Councilman).

COMING from a railroad family — on both sides—Crater even married into another railroad family. He became a fireman on the New York Central in 1924 and the following year started his 25-year career on the Jersey Central. When he became a locomotive engineer in 1941 he "fulfilled a life-long dream." It's a dream incidentally, which all railroad fans have at one time or another.

Long hours in the cab of a locomotive in no way lessens Crater's enthusiasm. He spends as much time as possible studying and arranging his collection of pictures, models and books or writing articles for the "Model Craftsman." Most of his articles concern the building of exact small-scale locomotive models, but he has also written many articles on railroading in general.

Rail fans of still another variety are Howard E. Johnston of Plainfield and Wilbur E. Wyckoff of North Plainfield, two of the state's leading trolley fans. Johnston is president and Wyckoff secretary of the North Jersey Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society—and as such are interested in all phases of railroading, although their primary love is the fast-vanishing trolley.

They had been pursuing trolleys all of their lives, but not intensively until 1932. That year, when on a trip to Stroudsburg, they were both suddenly struck with the fact that trolleys were "doomed."

"We began taking pictures like mad," says Johnston. "We went out to ride on last trips. Every time we had the chance we picked up some memento from a trolley due to be scrapped."

The result is that Johnston owns what is probably the largest collection of trolley pictures in the state. He has been on countless "farewell"



Warren B. Crater of Roselle Park achieved goal of every rail fan. He's a full-fledged engineer.



Trolley fans assemble for group photograph preparatory to leaving Newark on "farewell" trip over North Jersey railway about to be scrapped.

trolley trips throughout the East.

TROLLEY fans are museum minded, too, and in fact the Jersey group already owns what will be a basic component of any museum they establish. It's an open trolley car acquired from the Five Mile Beach Railway at Wildwood in 1945. Since then the trolley has been kept at Old Bridge, waiting for the day when the group can put up a building to inclose the trolley and exhibit the thousands of pieces of trolley equipment and appurtenances owned by the members.

Opinions differ among rail fans themselves at present as to whether or not rail hobbyists will thrive and increase.

Many rail fans believe that some of the railroad management has never understood or appreciated the railfan fraternity nor appreciated their potentialities as a cadre of enthusiastic unpaid boosters. Rail fans sense a falling away from the days when railroads welcomed men and boys loaded with cameras and questions (although they still feel a welcome from train crews and most operating personnel).

Rail fans also complain that unless they are cultivated by the railroads themselves they are liable to wither and perhaps die out altogether. The fans believe the loss will be greater to the

railroads themselves than to the fans.

Nevertheless, in contemplating the future of rail fandom, the fact remains that young people still are highly susceptible to the fever.

THERE are scores of New Jersey boys and young men between the ages of 13 and 25 going through the same stages of evolution as their elders before them. Some are picture-takers, others are history minded. Some have specialized in individual lines or types of lines. A few, in fact, are far along the road to becoming "permanent" fans.

Tom Taber 3d, a senior at Stevens Institute is already the recognized historian of several of the state's short lines—particularly the defunct Rockaway Valley ("Rockabye Baby") and the very active Morristown & Erie. There is no question about how he became fascinated with railroading!

"Naturally my dad took me around to roundhouses while I was still a little boy and I became interested," comments Tom. "I didn't start out on my own hook until I was in the seventh grade, however. Then I decided to specialize in certain short lines."

One of Tom's contemporaries and close friends, Bill Young of Cranford, now an Army private stationed at Fort Belvoir, Va., is also a

short line man, but his interest spreads to all such lines rather than being concentrated in a few. Bill was only 16 when he founded a little paper called the "Crown Sheet," devoted entirely to short lines.

An even younger fan is Ed Weber, Chatham High School student who has built up a large collection of station pictures while tracing out abandoned and little used lines. He also has a solid collection of more than 150 short line railroad timetables.

THE Tabers—father and son—Lucas, Crater, Johnston, Wyckoff, Young and Weber. A few names out of the many hundreds who spend much of their waking time pursuing railroad lore. Yet they are representative.

They are representative because as normal people with widely varying interests they pursue the same hobby in varying ways. They are representative because they illustrate the vast appeal of railroading for all age groups and all professions.

There is just one group not under discussion at the moment—the little boys who are just beginning to wave at engineers. Tomorrow, however, they'll be snapping pictures and later they'll decide one railroad is to be enthused over more than any other. They'll be well on their way to a lifetime of pursuing the steel trail and the iron horse.

Make way, "permanent" rail fans!

THE END



Thomas T. Taber (center) with engine crew after hand-firing train from Hoboken to Scranton. At right is an early photograph of his son, Thomas Taber 3d.



Walter A. Lucas setting out on one of his picture-taking expeditions in 1917.



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